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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: PRESIDENT CHEN'S OVERSEAS TRIP, U.S.-TAIWAN  
RELATIONS

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused their coverage May 17 on alleged involvement by President Chen's son-in-law in insider trading, the pan-Green camp's successful attempt to block passage of the cross-Straits direct transportation amendments by the Legislative Yuan; the year-end Taipei and Kaohsiung mayoral races; and other local political issues. Nearly all papers carried on inside pages remarks by visiting former U.S. National Security Council Senior Director for Asian Affairs Michael Green Tuesday that the controversies over Chen's U.S. transit were "turbulence in an airplane ride," which will not affect overall Taiwan-U.S. relations. The pro-unification "United Daily News," however, reported Green's remarks from a different perspective; it ran a news story on page four that was headlined "Green: Bush Will Criticize Bian Again If Chen Moves Toward De Jure Taiwan Independence." Several papers also reported on results Tuesday of a poll conducted by the Taiwan Solidarity Union, which showed that Chen's approval rating has dropped to a new low of 5.8 percent, with 88 percent of respondents dissatisfied with the performance of the Chen administration over the past six years.

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest daily, criticized pan-Blue legislators for wanting to pass the cross-Straits direct transportation amendments. The editorial urged the pan-Blue camp not to do anything that would curry favor with China and sell out Taiwan. An opinion piece in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times," however, urged the Chen administration to listen to Washington's messages as recently delivered by Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick and AIT Taipei Director Stephen Young. End summary.

A) "Absurdity of 'Pan-Blue Camp's Direct Transportation Bill Amendments' As Revealed by 'Trip of Peace and Prosperity'"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 600,000] editorialized (5/17):

"President Chen made successful stop-overs in Libya and Batam, Indonesia during his recent overseas trip, which demonstrated Taiwan's determination to break its predicament on the diplomatic front and to expand its space in the international community. Chen's trip deserves Taiwan people's support. In the meantime, however, we have to admit the fact that Taiwan's maneuvering room in the international community is shrinking day by day because of China's five-decade-long insistence on 'one China.' ...

"This nation belongs to all Taiwan people, and even though its ruling party may change, there is only one Taiwan. This newspaper hopes the pan-Blue camp will see through China's 'one China' scheme and its attempt not to deal with the Taiwan government directly.

Convenience for businessmen should never override Taiwan's national security and sovereignty, and this paper hopes that [the pan-Blue camp] will not do anything to curry favor with Communist China and sell out Taiwan. ..."

B) "Nation Must Listen to US Messages"

Edward Chen, a professor in the Graduate Institute of American Studies at Tamkang University, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (5/17):

"... Bush's move to directly handle Chen's transit issue has echoes of US Vice President Dick Cheney's China visit in April 2004, when Cheney intimated for the first time that the US and China have a consensus on preventing Taiwanese independence. This consensus was extended during the recent meeting between Bush and Chinese President Hu Jintao, so that now high-ranking officials in the US administration, including Bush himself, will directly intervene at crucial points in the cross-strait relationship. ...

"Zoellick's statement is strong for diplomatic language. The underlying meaning is that once Chen breaks a promise, the US will use its own way of putting heavy pressure on him and will not allow him to cross the US' line of tolerance. ... Zoellick's talks of independence meaning war is a warning to Taiwan not to take any rash action. Young's talks of the benefits of direct cross-strait links indicates that the legislative push to establish these links has US support. The government needs to listen to both messages."

YOUNG